

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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AMEMBASSY BONN

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR PROP CZ

SUBJECT: SEMIANNUAL REPORT ON RADIO FREE EUROPE OUTPUT

REFS A. STATE 051717, B. PRAGUE 0899, C. PRAGUE 2718(NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CRITICISM OF RADIO FREE EUROPE BY OFFICIAL CZECHOSLOVAK MEDIA AND SPOKESMEN HAS TAKEN A MORE VIRULENT TURN SINCE LAST REPORT (REF B). AT THE SAME TIME, EMBASSY NOTES SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT SINCE APRIL IN RFE OUTPUT TO CSSR AS REFLECTED IN BROADCAST ANALYSIES. THESE TWO PHENOMENA MAY BE INTER-RELATED. WE THINK RFE IS BEING SOMEWHAT MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN BEFORE. END SUMMARY.

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2. OFFICIAL CZECHOSLOVAK VIEW: PRESS ATTACKS ON RFE HAVE

BEEN TOO NUMERIOUS IN THE SIX MONTHS ENDED TO REPORT ALL OF THEM. RECENTLY ATTACK RFE TOOK A NEW TURN, WITH SERIES IN PICTORIAL SEWKLY "SIGNAL", ENTITLED "WHO'S WHO IN CIA TRANSMITTERS 'FREE EUROPE' AND 'RADIO LIBERTY'" (REF C). ON SEPTEMBER 29 CZECHOSLOVAK DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON DUSAN SPACIL TOLD VISITING USIA ASSISTANT DIRECTOR JHON SHIRLEY THAT HE FOUND RFE COVERAGE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA "ABHORRENT."

3. AUDIBILITY: ISINCE LAST REPORT EMBASSY HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO MONITOR RFE ON THE AIR. IT SEEMS STILL TO BE HEAVILY JAMMED IN THE CAPITAL AND MAY BE JAMMED ELSEWHERE. DURING NEXT SIX MONTH REPORTING PERIOD, EMBASSY HOPES TO TAKE SOME SAMPLINGS OF AUDIO SIGNAL IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

4. CONTENT OF BROADCASTS: A. INTERNATIONAL NEWS: FROM OUR REVIEW OF BROADCAST ANALYSES IT APPEARS THAT REPORTING OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS CONTINUES TO BE GOOD. ESPECIALLY NOTABLE WAS REPORTING ON U.S. ELECTION CAMPAIGN, PORTUGUESE, ITALIAN AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENTS, AND THE MIDDLE EAST.

B. COMMUNIST AFFAIRS: SO-CALLED "CROSS-REPORTING" ON DEVELOPMENTS IN COMMUNIST WORLD AND ELSEWHERE IS A USEFUL FUNCTION OF RFE AND RECENT PRODUCT SEEMS TO BE ON THE WHOLE GOOD. MORE OF THIS COULD BE DONE, EMPHASIZING THE "POSITIVE" DEVELOPMENTS (FROM U.S. POINT OF VIEW) IN HUNGARY, FOR EXAMPLE.

C. CZECHOSLOVAK DEVELOPMENTS: EMBASSY BELIEVES IT IS RFE'S HANDLING OF INTERNAL CZECHOSLOVAK DEVELOPMENTS WHICH MOST ENRAGES GOC OFFICIALS. IT IS ALSO A TOUCHY SUBJECT WE BELIEVE WITH CZECHS AND SLOVAKS THEMSELVES. AS WITH ALL NEWS MEDIA, RFE RUNS THE RISK OF ALIENATING LISTENERS WHO MAY FEEL THEY ARE CLOSER TO THE NEWS THAN RADIO CAN POSSIBLY BE. INACCURACIES OF FACT AND OF INTERPRETATION ARE UNAVOIDABLE FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT THE SPECIAL CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH RFE OPERATES MAKE IT IMPERATIVE THAT, EVEN MORE THAN THE COMPETITION, RFE STRIVE FOR ACCURACY. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND WE HAVE IMPRESSION THAT REPORTS ARE GENERALLY ACCURATE AND PRESENTATION, ALTHOUGH HARD-HITTING, IS OBJECTIVE ENOUGH. WE WOULD CAUTION ONLY AGAINST THE ELEVATION OF INCOMPLETE OR DUBIOUS NEWS REPORTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO THE STATUS OF BROADCAST-WORTHY NEWS. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS MIGHT BE THE REPORT ON SEPTEMBER 2 ENTITLED "CZECHOSLOVAK ARMS FOR SOUTH AFRICA?" OR THE REPORTED CROSSING--(WAS IT EVER CONFIRMED?)--BY CZECHOSLOVAK BORDER GUARDS INTO AUSTRIA MENTIONED ON AUGUST 31 AND SEPTEMBER 4. ANOTHER SUBJECT WHICH MUST BE CAREFULLY HANDLED IS THAT OF AGRICULTURE AND ECONOMIC SHORTCOMINGS. WE HAVE LITTLE TO ADD TO OUR COMMENTS ON THIS SCORE MADE REFTEL B. WHILE OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT, IF ANYTHING,

CONTENT AND COVERAGE OF THESE SUBJECTS HAS IMPROVED, COMMENTS WHICH TEND ONLY TO BELITTLE THE STATE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE ECONOMY MAY, WE FEEL, BE TAKEN BY THE CZECHOSLOVAKS AS MINDING SOMEONE ELSE'S BUSINESS. THEY KNOW BETTER THAN ANY OUTSIDER HOW INEFFICIENCIES AND SHORTAGES AFFECT THEM; WE BELIEVE THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN HEARING ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS THEY CAN LEARN ABOUT ONLY FROM FOREIGN SOURCES.

D. CULTURAL PROGRAMS: THREE CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PROGRAMS WHICH STRUCK US AS USEFUL AND INTERESTING TO CZECHOSLOVAK AUDIENCE WERE "AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY THINKING IN 19TH CENTURY CZECH SOCIETY", "CZECHOSLOVAK DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS", AND SERIALIZATION OF INTERVIEW WITH HANS MORGENTHAU ON ATTITUDES OF AMERICANS AND RUSSIANS TOWARDS THEIR GOVERNMENTS. THESE ARE EXAMPLES OF AREAS IN WHICH RFE IS WELL QUALIFIED TO COMPETE NOT ONLY WITH WESTERN MEDIA BUT WITH THE CZECHOSLOVAK DOMESTIC MEDIA.

5. EMBASSY NOTES WITH APPROVAL THAT THE SHORT PROGRAM "DIARY" WHICH WE FOUND OBJECTIONABLE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN DROPPED, AND THAT FARE HAS BEEN LEAVENED WITH POLITICAL JOKES. BYRNE

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